



"This Man's Sister Thinks the World o' That Brand of Sin"

along to our camping spots we sort of naturally knew inside us that the May training that year wouldn't be a really helpful and patriotic affair without there was further and complete understanding between Starks and Byron on certain points that I needn't elaborate.

I have an idea that the spectators, after a time, noticed that something out of the ordinary b'ilin' was stewing between us, especially when the affair at the brook was over.

The Starks Stalwarts were deploying down the hill toward the brook, and the Byron Bears were also deploying along the brook's banks, and all could see that we were due to collide. But neither Cap'n Britt nor Cap'n Cole would order "Halt!" We knew then for sure that there was something special up between 'em; but the rest of us were by that time too mad to projick on reasons. We didn't care. No whisper of "Halt!" We were glad. Cap. Britt snapped the Stalwarts into platoon formation and rammed us against the Bears on the double-quick and they being on the sloping bank just naturally fell into the brook, and as they fell they grabbed us, each man his man, and in we piled on top of them, all hugging so affectionately that half the crowd was nigh drowned when they finally got us untangled.

Old Colonel Zaccheus Jordan came whurrooping up on his fat gray mare—plickity, plockity, plack! whoa!—and I never heard a man swear so. He was shaking both fists, and his chin was poked out between old Keturah Ann's ears, and I'll bet that a full pint of new rum had settled right into the end of his nose.

"Ye're the everlastin' sp'ilin' of the whole muster!" he yelled. "Ye come onto this ground to-day, hookin' at each other like Durham steers.

Ye've been ready to lock horns ever since. Ye ain't worth a turnip crop in Tophet, neither crowd of ye! And as for drill, ye can't drill beet-seed. Git to your quarters, all of ye!" And—plackity-plack!—away umbered the fat gray mare that Colonel Zaccheus Jordan followed at the plow-tail with a lot more comfort than he was feeling that day a-straddling her.

Well, neither company would have added much to the polite spectacular effect of a drill just then. We had mud-gobs in our hair, smutches across our faces and were soaked. But every man was like a barrel of lime—the water on him and in him made him burn hotter.

So we sat down on either side the brook: on one side the "Smut-foots, Clean-foots" (that was the Stalwarts' nickname, because we were mostly

carriage-shop men); the "Boot-foots, Shoe-foots" on the other bank (and those were the Byrons, for there were a lot of little shoe shops in that town). We sat glaring at each other like so many cats cleaning themselves, each man using a handful of grass instead of a tongue. We had other employment for our tongues.

"Did you hear what Cap'n Sile Cole done last week?" shouted one of the Bears. "He stood one of his paint ladders up on end right out in the open field, run up the ladder so quick it didn't have time to tip over, stepped out on the air, h'isted the ladder up another length, run to the top, ketched the upper rung, and held himself right out arm's length by the slack of his britches and then got down again before the ladder had time to fall. That's what our Cap'n Sile Cole done—and we're all of us good for one length of ladder, and then tell us—can ye?—that ye've got a man in Starks spry enough to fight!"

"That's only a monkey trick," replied a Stalwart. "It ain't test of a real man. Here's what our own Cap'n Mose Britt done last week. The two boom men in the mill-pond were standing on a log arguing whuther McCarrison's bat-eared bulldog can lick Todd's brindle terrier. Mose Britt hollered to 'em from the mill door to hitch that log onto the slip chain, cause he wanted it. But they were so busy chawin' tobacco and talkin' dog they didn't hear Mose, and so he stood there in the mill door, tied a rope to the end of a pick-pole and throwed it spear-fashion, and it went forty rods and stuck right into the end of that log those men were standing on, and Mose give it such a quick and almighty yank that the log come right out of the bark and left the men standin' on that bark and still talkin'. And they never knowed that log was gone till they heard Mose callin' for another one. Now talk about your havin' muscle in Byron!"

"Aw, it's spryness what counts," said a Bear. "We'll lick ye and be a mile away before you can get your fists up."

"Let me tell you one thing," broke in a Stalwart. "If our Cap'n Mose Britt had been Gen'l George Washington and had come to the Delaware River that time, Mose wouldn't have waited for a boat. No, sir! He would have just kicked up a bubble, stood on it and let the wind blow him across. That's how light on foot Mose Britt is, and we all take after him, and if it's being spry you're countin' on, come out of your dream!"

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That's only a sample of it. It was every moment getting clear that there was no chance of compromising the thing. That question of spryness and muscle had got to be settled. We sat there and scruffed away at our clothes with grass tufts and hollered louder and louder and waited for night to come and the people to go away; for the feelings of the girls were always first to be considered in the old militia days.

And Captain Mose Britt stood with his arms folded and scowled across at Captain Sile Cole, and Captain Sile Cole stood with his arms folded and passed back the compliments of the season—not saying them, but looking them.

They let the rest of us do the talking.

And that being in the good old times when new rum was steady beverage even for the best of folks, and pepper-sass hot and the standing up for your own rights and your own town a matter of duty, most of the folks that came and hung around the place said things to make us mad, just as people like to cuff and wopse a dog's ears hard before ste'-boying him on. That is, all except the two ministers, the parson from Byron and the parson from Starks. They came down to us and talked and talked, soothing and deprecatory, and everybody was very quiet and let them talk, and nobody said a word when they got done. Captain Mose Britt never undinclined either his eyebrows or his mouth, nor did Captain Sile Cole.

So the ministers hurried away and tackled Colonel Zaccheus Jordan, who was then standing around his tent trying to get the kinks out of his anatomy, and Colonel Zach, who was from Standish and hated both Starks and Byron, roared to 'em that he hoped to Gad the Clean-foots, Smut-foots and Boot-foots, Shoe-foots would get together and claw themselves into fiddle-strings like the Kil-kenny cats, so that they never could spile another May training for him. There wasn't much milk of human kindness left in old Zach Jordan late on a training-day, nor much new rum in his black bottle either. The coaxing ministers couldn't get him to stir a peg to interfere. He only promised that he'd amble down to look on after the fight got to going in good shape.

The selectmen of Byron and Starks who were on the grounds said that it wasn't a town officer's business to interfere in militia matters. That was before Sherman said that "War is hell"; but the

selectmen intimated to the ministers that a man with a uniform on wasn't exactly a standing advertisement of the peace of Heaven.

So it happened that the only one the parsons could interest in interfering was old Peleg Warner, the Eustis constable, and they brought him along with them.

It was getting near sundown then, and the farmer folk that had chores to do and a long way to ride were trailing off along the roads leading from the four corners. And the girls had to go too, of course. It looked as though "This Mon's Seester Loves Him" we might be prepared to begin the long-looked-for festivities soon.

"Gents," said old Peleg, "the elders here has entered complaint about ye. They say they've heard that ye are plannin' on some kind of redic'lous actions. I sha'n't allow no such goings-on in this town."

We were eating our squares of gingerbread and sipping new rum, and paid about as much attention to old Peleg as we would to a mosquito from Eustis bog.

"Which side are you favoring, Constable Peleg Warner?" inquired a Bear. Peleg was on their bank.

"Nuther," said he.

"Then stand in the brook on neutral ground where you belong," said the Bear, giving him a hunch.

In he went. We wouldn't let him come out on our side, and he waded away down the stream, using language that constables aren't supposed to use when there are ministers present.

And after that for some time nothing was said, and the dark came down. We stacked our guns. The Bears stacked theirs. They hung up their cockaded chapeaux on the bayonets. We hung up our stove-pipe pompon caps. We took off our belts; so did the Bears. Both sides rolled up their sleeves. We drained off the last mouthful of new rum in our canteens; and so did the Bears; and then the empty canteens rattled on the ground together.

"As it ain't generally customary to open such little occasions as this with an invocation, elders," suggested Captain Mose Britt politely, "and as you are standing right in the center of the boulevard, might we ask you to retire?"

"We shall not," said the two of 'em together.

Now we hadn't been paying much attention to the parsons for the last half hour. One was on our bank, the other across the brook—the Starks parson with our flock, the Byron shepherd with his own flock. Their arms were folded like the Captains' arms, and they scowled too.

"Ye shall no' dees-grace the fair fame of the town of Starks thus," said Elder Davison. "It shall ne'er be said that the meenisters stood idly nigh and spiered the young men open the vials of wrath for the worship of the Beelzebub of battles. I will stand on this side the burn and Parson Wormell on the aither, and we'll knock down the



"This Mon's Seester Loves Him"



Parson Wormell Was Built Like a Percheron



Parson Davison's Eyebrows Looked as Though They Were Caterpillars

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